

ENFIELD champions, Wycombe Wanderers runners-up and Dagenham third. That's my view of how the Rothmans Isthmian League title race will be decided at the end of the season.

With the season now drawing to its close, Enfield have the unquestioned advantage of points in the bag and their remaining four matches will all be played on Saturdays. Looking at their last four games they meet Hitchin and Sutton at home and Croydon and Slough away.

Hitchin are inconsistent at the moment but they will have to do extraordinary well to win at Southbury Road while Sutton's fortunes suggest another certain three points for Enfield. The key games are those away from home. Croydon, as Wycombe found to their cost, is not the most pleasurable of places and they could easily take a share of the spoils from the Division One leaders.

That leaves Slough, who are Enfield's last opponents of the season. The Rebels, of course, are still in the F.A. Trophy and their end of season form is likely to be affected by their progress in the semi-final legs. On their day, there are few teams to touch Slough Town and if they produce the goods, Enfield will be struggling.

But although Enfield are my favourites for the title, there will be many backing Wycombe to take the championship for the fifth time in seven years. The Blues have two more matches to play than Enfield but of those six games, four are at Loakes Park, including three in a row.

The home games are against Leytonstone, Slough, Barking and Dulwich. Having won at Leytonstone they should record a double but Slough are the Blues' bogey side and again, much will depend on the outcome of the F.A. Trophy. Barking and

## STUART EARP looks at the Isthmian League title race

Dulwich should be put away without too much trouble although they have improved lately under new manager Jimmy Langley.

### OUTSIDERS

That leaves the away fixtures. Walthamstow's inconsistency makes them an unknown quantity and they might trouble Wanderers on the night while Tooting score a lot of goals but are also weak at the back — look at their goals for and against this season — 68, 57.

I regard Dagenham as outsiders because they are bound to be influenced by the bid for the F.A. Trophy. They have also a difficult run-in with three away games and four at home. They meet Tooting and Staines home and away plus Croydon and Bishop's Stortford at home and Hayes away.

'Daggers' have been in the title race for the last three seasons but each time they have fallen away at the last minute. I expect them to drop points at Hayes and

Tooting while Staines could also trouble them.

All three title candidates are relatively free from injury problems at the moment, although Dagenham's John Borland is out with knee ligament trouble. It all depends on who can find the consistency in the remaining matches.

Since Ted Hardy returned to Enfield he has settled the side down nicely, made a few signings and got the results he wanted. Eddie Reeve is top goalscorer and the new attacking flair of Eddie Dillsworth has served them well. There are rumours that Tooting marksman Nick Glover will be joining the Southbury Road club and if that happens, they will be even more dangerous up front.

Had Wycombe not dropped three points at Croydon last Saturday, they would have been breathing down the necks of the current champions, but that 1-0 defeat set them back considerably. It was a game of missed chances and had the Blues cashed in on their many second half opportunities, they would have won comfortably. It is their inability to take chances that might cost them the title and much will depend on the front runners.

### BEST BACK FOUR

Manager John Reardon has the best back four in the league and now he seems to have found a settled blend in midfield. It is in the front line that the problems occur and leading goalscorer Ian Pearson has had to shoulder the burden for too long. Where would the Blues have been without him this season?

Wycombe's biggest advantage is their four home games. If the crowds decide to return in numbers to Loakes Park, they could have a lifting effect on the team and 12 points from their four home games could really put pressure on the others.

But wherever the title ends up this season, I feel it must be said that the standard of football throughout the Isthmian League has taken a drop. Wycombe, for example, are currently fielding one of the weakest sides in the last seven seasons. You have only to compare the teams of previous years with this season's squad.

Most supporters I speak to seem to agree that Wycombe's current second position in the table is a little false but you can't get away from the fact that they had done a remarkable job to get this far. Is it too much to think they could get just one place further?

**WYCOMBE** Wanderers, hard on the heels of leaders Enfield after last week's 2-1 win at Hitchin, will be aiming to add three more Rothmans Isthmian League points to their total tomorrow (Saturday) when they take on Leytonstone at Loakes Park.

While Enfield meet Hitchin at home tomorrow, Wanderers will probably field the side that won at Topfield, although there are doubts over the fitness of Keith Mead. The Blues' centre back has been receiving treatment for a knee ligament injury this week. John Maskell is also struggling with a back injury which could mean Peter Spittle continuing in goal. Wanderers are fortunate to have such an able deputy.

Leytonstone have injury problems, too. Tony Bass and John Still have both been missing from the side recently through injury but Bass is scheduled to make a return. Still is a doubtful starter.

With just five games to go, Wanderers have a real chance to put pressure on Enfield with three successive home games against Leytonstone, Slough and Barking. They will be helped tomorrow by the advantage of an away victory over the 'Stones' in February. Two goals by Ian Pearson and another from Howard Kettleborough put them 3-0 up before Steve King pulled one back from the penalty spot. King is the club's top goalscorer with 19.

On Monday Wanderers travel to Staines Town in the quarter final of the League Cup. With four points from their two league games against the Middlesex club, the Blues have a good chance to reach the semi-finals where they will join Barking, Hendon, and either Dagenham or Dulwich Hamlet.

## ENFIELD

Opponents	Venue	Date
Hitchin Town	Home	April 16
Croydon	Away	April 23
Sutton United	Home	April 30
Slough Town	Away	May 7

## WYCOMBE

Opponents	Venue	Date
Leytonstone	Home	April 16
Slough	Home	April 21
Barking	Home	April 23
Walthamstow	Away	April 26
Dulwich Hamlet	Home	May 7
Tooting and Mitcham	Away	May 10

## DAGENHAM

Opponents	Venue*
Hayes	Away
Staines	Away
Tooting and Mitcham	Away
Bishop's Stortford	Home
Croydon	Home
Tooting and Mitcham	Home
Staines	Home

\*Dates for Dagenham's matches have still to be decided.